

6.

IS THERE A GOD?

LESSON 6 TEXT HANDOUT

OBJECTIVE

The objective is to be able to explain, in a logical sequence and with a visual aid, the cosmological argument for the existence of God and can name other arguments sometimes used. The following are the steps taken to get to that point.

1. DEFINE GOD

Before we can know whether there is a God, we must first define what such a God would be like? What characteristics do you think a divine being would have to possess?

A spirit being, who is eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere.

This definition becomes the beginning point of this discussion.

2. DISCUSS THE METHODS OF PROOF

There are two types of proof. The first is proof by the physical senses. Thus we can know that a dog is in our yard because we see him and hear him bark. Our physical senses have told us that the dog is there. This is *proof by observation*.

That God exists, of course, cannot be proved in this way because, by definition, He is spirit and, thus, cannot be seen or touched by the physical senses. As non-material, He cannot be proved by physical observation. A Russian cosmonaut said he had been through outer space and could testify there was no God because he had not seen him. He was thinking of God's existence in the wrong realm.

There is also, however, *proof by reasoning*. This is how we prove many things we cannot observe by our physical senses. Back to the dog. Maybe you don't see the dog in the yard but you see footprints from a dog, and you see something the dog left in your yard and you reason to the conclusion that the dog was there. If you observe what only dogs can cause, then you reason that a dog has been in your yard. Reasoning this way may not reach certainty, but we draw the conclusion that is the most likely.

To take another example, you want to know whether you can trust a person with an important job. So you think back. I asked him to write a letter to someone and he didn't do it. I asked him to take me to town and he never showed up. I asked him to visit someone in the hospital and he said he would, but he never did. I don't think I will trust him with this important assignment. This process is reasoning to a conclusion. We do it every day.

So while we cannot prove by observation that God exists, we can reason about effects present for which only God, as we have defined Him, could be the cause. Thus, we seek to find the most likely conclusion based on what we know. Since God, by definition, is something that cannot be observed by physical senses, we must use *reason* to come to the best possible conclusion about whether God exists. We must answer this question: "Is it more reasonable that a spirit being exists who is eternal, knows all, sees all, is all powerful and is everywhere, or is it more reasonable that such a being does not exist?"

3. FIND A COMMON POINT OF AGREEMENT

Our method for approaching the answer to this question is to start with something virtually all can agree on, even all can observe: *The Universe Exists*. Except for those who doubt any existence at all, we can use the universe as a common starting point. The earth and stars, and the sun and moon, and human beings exist. We know this from physical observation. So we use the existence of the universe as a point of beginning.

This approach is, in fact, what the Bible itself recommends. In Romans 1:19-20, Paul writes that "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made." So God expected people to look at what has been made and to ask, "Where did this come from?"

So the world, the universe and human beings are here. Something brought these into existence. Their presence asks, "Where did we come from?" We are *effects*. What is our *cause*? This is our starting point as we think about whether God exists. The universe exists. What was its cause?

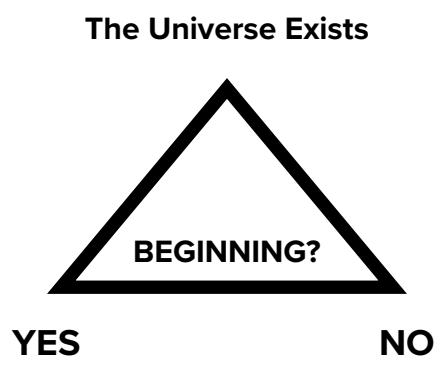
4. PRESENT FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

Each of these questions has two and only two alternatives. Note the drawings which help us visualize the reasoning process we are using. These drawings can help you explain this lesson to someone else.

From this beginning point of agreement that the universe exists, we can discuss with someone a series of questions, each of which has *only two answers—a yes or a no*. It is important to examine both alternatives to each question. The "yes" and "no" possibility of each must be considered to see which is more in harmony with what we know. We should, then, examine *both* alternatives to determine which is the *more likely answer*. Based on this answer we will move to the next step.

Question 1: Did the universe have a beginning?

There are only two alternatives—*yes, it had a beginning or no, it has always existed*. Which alternative has the most support from observation. There is strong agreement among scientists on this point: the universe has *not always been here*. Such proposals as the "steady state" theory or the oscillating model have been made in an attempt to show that the universe is eternal. These, however, have generally been discarded as impossible. Dr. William L. Craig, in his book, The Existence of God, stated, "Both the steady state and oscillating models of the universe fail to fit the facts of observational cosmology. Therefore we can conclude once more that the universe began to exist" (pp. 59-60).



Dr. Edwin Hubble has plotted the speeds of the galaxies and says they

are moving apart at enormous speeds. From this observation, scientists conclude that there was a point of beginning when these galaxies sprang into existence and started their journeys. Dr. Robert Jastrow, founder of NASA's Institute for Space Studies, has written in God and the Astronomers, "Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same. The chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy" (pp. 11).

Look at these points which suggest that the universe has not always been here. Energy is being changed from a useful to a non-useful state. If everything had always been here, there would be no useful energy left.

Also, since, according to the second law of thermodynamics, unattended systems tend toward chaos, had the earth always existed with no intervention, it would by now be in chaos.

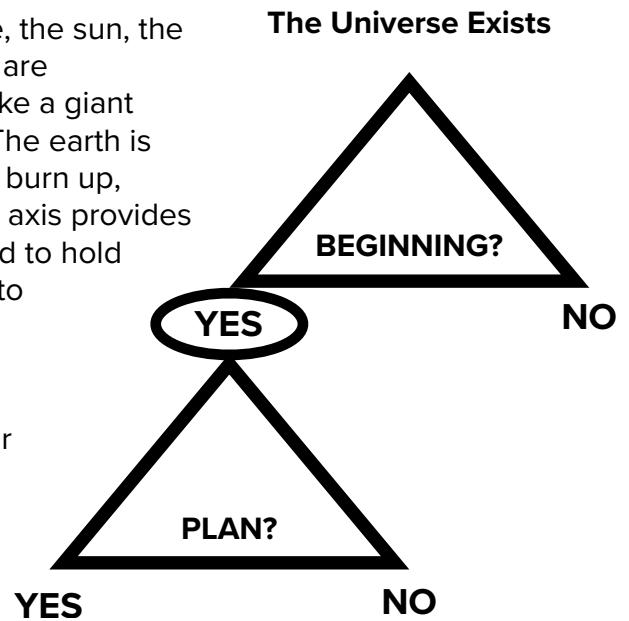
So the evidence is quite clear that the universe had a beginning. It has not always been here. All but a few scientists have drawn this conclusion.

Question 2: Did the universe begin with a plan?

The universe had a beginning, but was that beginning *accidental and spontaneous, that is by chance*, or was the beginning *planned*? Let's look at both possibilities.

From observation we find that the solar system, our universe, the sun, the moon, the earth and human beings have many features that are systematic, orderly, and precise. The universe works much like a giant clock. It has moving parts. It has order, system, and design. The earth is exactly the right distance from the sun: closer and we would burn up, further away and we would freeze. The tilt of the earth on its axis provides the seasons we need. Gravity is exactly the strength we need to hold us on a rotating earth. The plants and animals are balanced to provide an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Our air has in it exactly the elements needed to sustain life. Plants, animals, and human beings have within themselves the power to reproduce "after their kind." These and more similar observations declare the systematic, orderly, and precise nature of life and our solar system.

Dr. Hugh Ross, Ph. D. in astronomy, states, "Astronomers and physicists widely acknowledge that the only reasonable explanation for the intricately harmonious features of the universe, our solar system, our planet--all ingeniously focused on the requirements for life--is the action and ongoing involvement of a personal, intelligent Creator" (William Dembski (ed.), *Mere Creation*, p. 371.) Ross lists twenty-nine characteristics of the universe and forty-five characteristics of the solar system that must be just as they are for life to exist on earth. He calculates the possibility of these happening by chance on even one planet in the universe at one in "one hundred billion trillion trillion trillion" (p. 381).



Now the critical question. Can we provide an example of anything in our experience that has order, system, function, and design which got that way by accident rather than plan? Can we imagine a

camera, for example, appearing by accident? Could then the far superior human eye have come by accident? A computer without a plan? A TV set rising spontaneously out of a pile of electronic parts? the Empire State Building without blueprints? Could any such things come into existence purely by chance, by accident?

If none of these lesser things could have come into existence without a plan, then how could the great universe or the beings that live on the earth have come with no plan, entirely by accident? If everything we know of with order and design was planned, is it conceivable that the universe, the greatest of all things would come purely by accident? Nothing in our experience allows such a conclusion. Can you stand at the Royal Gorge in Colorado and imagine that the bridge spanning the canyon came by accident? Then can you imagine that the immeasurably more magnificent river, mountains, trees, and sky surrounding that bridge came by accident?

Of course we have discovered by accident some things that already existed or by accident have found uses for things that already exist. But is there anything that operates, that has system and design that came into existence by accident?

Sir Fred Hoyle, in his book The Intelligent Universe, used this analogy. "What are the chances that a tornado might blow through a junkyard containing all the parts of a 747, accidentally assemble them into a plane, and leave it ready for take-off?" He also computes that for a blindfolded person to solve a Rubik's Cube, he would have to make one move every second for 1.35 trillion years. If that stretches your imagination, think of getting the 200,000 amino acids required for each human cell by chance and , still by chance, getting them at exactly the same time so they could work together in a single cell.

Hoyle concludes, "As biochemists discover more and more about the awesome complexity of life, it is apparent that its chances of originating by accident are so minute that they can be completely ruled out. Life cannot have arisen by chance." (pp. 11-12, 19, 251).

Recently the greatest chess player in the world, Gary Kasparov, was defeated at chess by a highly sophisticated computer. Would anyone seriously consider that this computer came into existence by accident? That someone turned up on a deserted island where there were mineral deposits and frequent lightning, and there sat "Big Blue." Yet, some ask us to believe that the even greater human brains that built and programmed this computer resulted from an accumulation of chance events.

Recent biological discoveries demonstrate that each cell not only contains matter but it contains information as well. In fact, the nucleus of each human cell contains more information than all 30 volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica put together.

For life to have come from accident, then, not only must matter have sprung into being in a functioning form but all the required information coded within it had to come at that same instant.

So we reason that if everything in our experience with order and design came from a plan, then the universe with its order and design on the greatest scale of all, must also have come from a plan. Some who deny the existence of God propose "a big bang." This explanation suggests that all existing matter began from a very small but powerful substance the size of a geometric point with no dimensions which exploded to give us all that now exists. Their initial substance, they say, came into existence by accident and its accidental explosion gave us all we have. This explanation falls short in two principal ways: (1) it provides no explanation for the origin of the beginning substance and (2) evidence does not support the proposition that all living things came from the same substance.

Which explanation, then, is more in harmony with what we know? Plan or accident? Which is more reasonable?

Remember our approach. Each of our four questions has only two possible answers --yes or no. We are not asking which answer can be proved beyond all doubt. We are, rather, asking, "Which of the two possible alternatives is the more likely?"

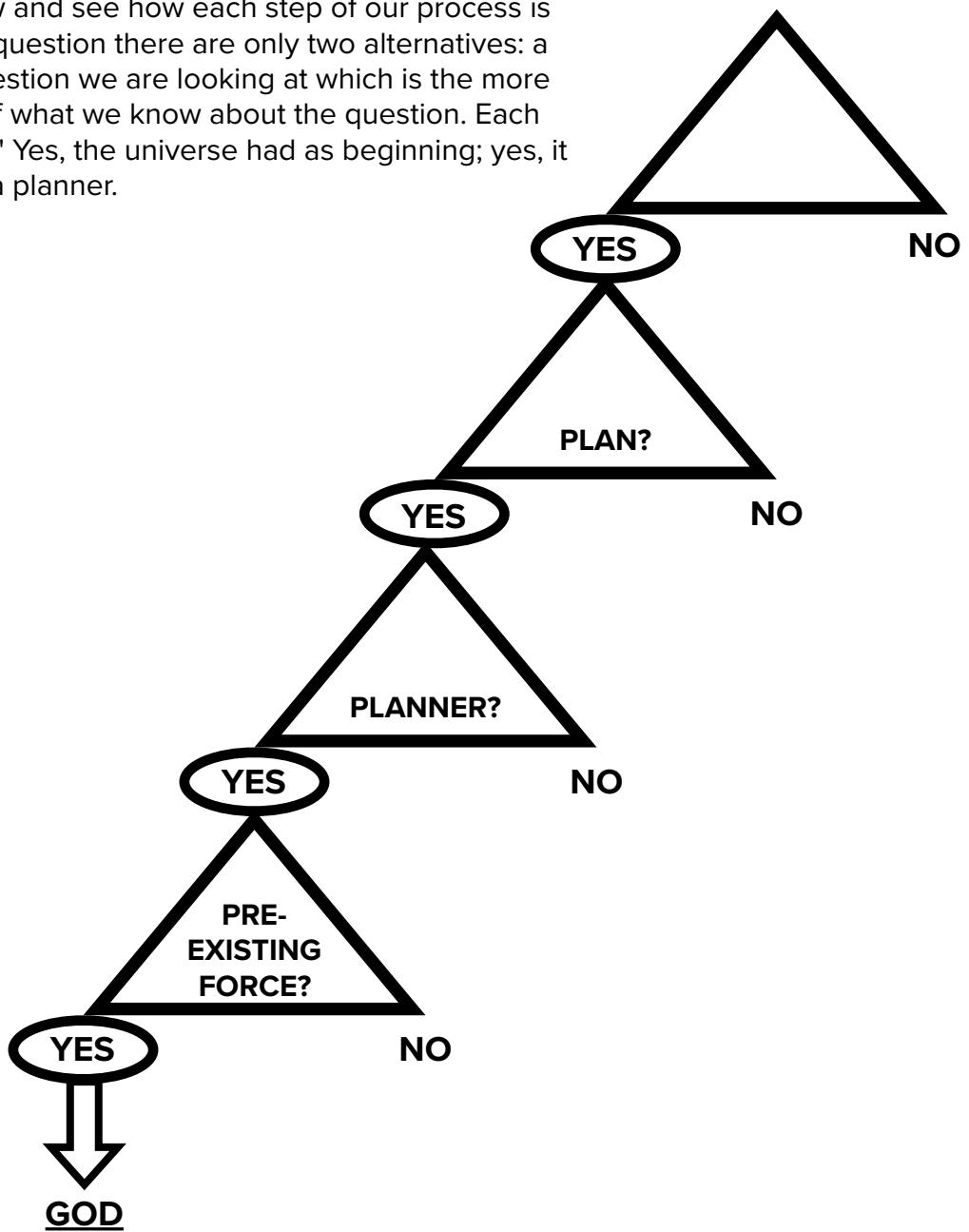
Did our universe come by accident or by plan? Our experience clearly suggests that "by plan" is the more likely alternative.

Question 3: Did the plan have a planner?

Obviously, if there is a plan, there must have been a planner. No blueprints without an architect, no design drawings without an engineer. If an object's order requires that it came from a design, that design requires a designer. Certainly our experience can provide no case of a plan without a planner. Since there is no support for a plan without a planner, then if there is a plan, there must be a planner.

Look at the drawing below and see how each step of our process is being tracked. With each question there are only two alternatives: a yes or a no. With each question we are looking at which is the more likely alternative in view of what we know about the question. Each time, the answer is a "yes." Yes, the universe had a beginning; yes, it came by plan; yes, it had a planner.

The Universe Exists



Question 4: What must the planner of the universe be like?

This planner of the universe designed and brought all material things into existence, set them in order, gave them the ability to reproduce, and sustains their existence. Since he existed outside of matter, he must be *non-material*. Since he created time, he must be outside of time, or *eternal*. Since he created space, he must be outside of space and thus is *everywhere*. He must have vast *knowledge* to know how to create life, reproduction, and order. He must have tremendous *power* to bring all these things into existence. Again, we take the "yes" alternative. We cannot conceive of the planner of the universe without such qualities.

5. SO WHERE HAVE WE COME?

Back to our definition of God—a spirit being who is eternal, with vast knowledge, tremendous power, and who is everywhere. We began with what we can observe—that the universe exists, and have looked at the evidence to select *the more reasonable* of two answers to four basic questions about where it came from. Practice drawing the complete chart to keep these steps easily before you.

This approach to answering the question about God's existence is called the *cosmological argument*—that is, an argument based on the existence of the cosmos or world. We are listing this as our first reason for God's existence.

6. SEVERAL OTHER ARGUMENTS MAY ALSO BE MADE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- B. *Human beings have a sense of purpose not present in lower animals.* Where did this sense of purpose come from if we are only accidental creatures? Why do only humans have this sense of purpose if we ascended from lower forms? Why do only humans desire to have a meaningful existence, to produce something beneficial, to improve the human condition, to be of service to others? If we are the product of lower forms of life, then where, along the chain of development, did such a desire creep into our psyche?
- C. *Human beings have a conscience.* Why do we have a sense of right and wrong when animals do not? If humans are but the product of a series of evolutionary accidents, where did this conscience come from? Does not this characteristic of humans suggest that a moral being made us and imparted to us this quality? Surely this is more likely than to say conscience was accidentally inserted between two steps of an evolutionary chain?
- D. *Human beings can think on a level far beyond that of any other life forms.* If humans sprang into existence from nothing or from lower animals, how can we account for our astounding mental capacities? Complex mathematical thinking and abstract reasoning are so far beyond what animals can do mentally. Such processes are surely beyond the power of an accumulation of accidents to produce. The gap between humans and any other forms of life is so great that chance is not an acceptable explanation for the differences.
- E. *All civilizations throughout history have believed in some form of a higher being.* Where did the notion of a power greater than humans come from? Why this universal longing for a power greater than ourselves unless such a power put that desire in his creation? No great world civilization has been primarily atheistic. Why not?

So, we have suggested five basic reasons for believing in God: (1) as the best explanation for the existence of the universe, (2) because humans have a sense of purpose; (3) because humans have a conscience, (4) because of the powers of the human mind, and (5) because all civilizations have believed in a higher power.

Learn to do the simple drawing suggested as a way to visualize this approach to explaining “Why I Believe in God.” It demonstrates the four essential questions and shows that each of them has only two possible answers. At each stage, we discuss which alternative is more reasonable.

7. FAITH IS THE RESULT OF THIS EVIDENCE AND REASONING

The Bible calls faith an *outcome*. Faith is the result of an examination of the evidence. Romans 1:19-20 tells us that God expected people of old to look at the universe as evidence and conclude that there was a creator and then to honor Him. The evidence was to produce faith. John teaches the same: “these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God” (John 20:31). Look at the evidence, he says, and faith will be the result. Hebrews 11:1, likewise, teaches that faith is a “conviction” that unseen things are real, and that conviction becomes the basis of how we act.

We do not, then, decide what we would like to be true and then “leap” to that conclusion calling it faith. Rather, we look at the evidence and draw *the most reasonable conclusion*. Once we have concluded that a spirit-being exists, we take that conclusion as a foundation for our faith and action.

The faith of scripture, then, is not founded on personal feelings or experiences. Faith, as the Bible presents it, begins as a conclusion arrived at by a careful examination of the evidence--and the evidence is sufficient for us to conclude that a spirit-being with all power and all knowledge not only exists, but made the universe and all that is in it. Believing that, we accept our accountability to the God who made us and we seek to live in a way that pleases Him. This faith grows as we become closer and closer to God and He becomes more and more an important factor in our lives. We grow to trust in Him and to believe that He knows best for our lives.

We do not, then, believe there is a God simply because we want to believe it. We come to that conclusion by evidence and reason. Having found a belief in God the best answer to the cause of what we see, we then begin to develop our own personal relationship with Him.

Useful Reference:

Paul Little, Know Why You Believe. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1988.